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Written on JANUARY 14, 2014 AT 6:00 AM by VKREMER

## Living Healthy with Fruits and Veggies

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**By Lt. Cmdr. Amit Sood, clinical dietitian and department head of Nutrition Management, Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton**



Most people are aware that eating a variety of fruits and vegetables provides them with essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients that aren't found in other foods. In addition to supporting weight loss and maintaining a healthy weight, consuming the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables daily also helps decrease the risk of diseases such as stroke, cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and certain types of cancers (1). However, did you know that eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day may also prolong your life? A new study in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition showed that incorporating these important foods into your diet may also help you live longer (2).

It may be overwhelming to think about eating five fruits and vegetables every day, so to start, I recommend setting a goal of having at least one piece of fruit or vegetable serving at every meal. One of the easiest ways to do this is at lunch or dinnertime. Begin with a vegetable course, such as a salad, then eat the main entrée, and end with fruit for dessert or as part of the dessert.

### No More Excuses: Common Myths Busted

There are many misconceptions that prevent Sailors, Marines and military families from getting the daily recommended intake of fruits and vegetables. The following addresses some of the most common:

- **Daily servings of fruit and veggies must come from fresh, raw produce.** Not so!

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All forms count, including fresh, canned, dried, frozen and 100 percent juice. However, beware of canned and cupped fruit that is not packed in its own juice or water, as it may contain extra sugar which translates to added calories. If selecting 100 percent juice, it should be chosen for no more than one of your total servings for the day.

• **Vegetables are difficult and time consuming to cook.** This is simply untrue. Most supermarkets and commissaries sell packaged, pre-washed salads, as well prepared, ready-to-cook and bags of frozen vegetables that can be steamed in the microwave in just a few minutes.

• **If I don't like fruits or vegetables, I can just have a pre-packaged vegetable juice instead.** This is tricky, because pre-packaged vegetable and fruit drinks can be used as a substitute because they contain the same vitamins and minerals as fruits and vegetables, but they are missing the fiber, so you need to be careful not to use those types of drinks to cover all your daily servings. Fiber is important because it aids in digestion, and it keeps you feeling fuller, longer. These drinks may also be high in sugar and sodium, so check the label.

• **Fruits and vegetables are expensive.** In reality, meat and dairy items are usually the most expensive parts of a meal. To accommodate the cost of buying more fruits and vegetables while maintaining your current food budget, I recommend slightly reducing the amount of meat and/or dairy products purchased. You can substitute two or three meat dishes a week with a bean, legume, or tofu dish, saving you money, and providing good quality and beneficial protein as well. Also, when buying fresh produce, always try to buy what is in season to stretch your dollar farther.

• **Fruits and vegetables aren't always available to me.** With our Navy and Marine Corps fully committed to health and mission readiness of the fleet, healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables are everywhere, even while underway, so no matter where you are there are no excuses not to make smart choices.

• **It's hard to eat healthy every day and every time I start, I end up falling off track.** Don't pressure yourself to be perfect 100 percent of the time in eating your recommended number of servings of fruits and veggies every day. Getting the right amount the majority of the time, which is four out of seven days a week, is a great start to changing your health in a positive way.

To learn more about ways to incorporate fruits and vegetables into your diet, please visit the [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's Health Promotion and Wellness Toolbox website](#). For tasty fruit and veggies recipes, check out [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/](#) and [www.choosemyplate.gov](#).

*Lt. Cmdr. Amit Sood has been a clinical dietitian with the Navy since 2004, has a Master's Degree in Dietetics from Kansas State University, and is a Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics. He has given more than 500 nutrition classes and lectures to more than 50 commands worldwide, and served as the sole military dietitian during his time at U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, Japan and his deployment to Kuwait during Operation Iraqi Freedom. In October 2013 LCDR Sood assumed the position as Program Manager/Executive Agent of Navy Nutrition programs, OPNAV N17.*

Resources

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